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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 101335Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8217
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS ACCRA 000916

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958; N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KCRM](#) [GH](#)

SUBJECT: Ethnic and Political Dispute leads to violence in Accra Market

Ref: Accra 827

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In an incident of violence with political and ethnic undertones, three individuals were hacked to death August 25 following a dispute over a piece of land at the notorious Kontonba Yam market in Accra. The conflict took place between members of rival migrant communities from northern Ghana, with tensions fueled by chieftaincy disputes and partisan differences between the communities. A senior leader in the opposition New Patriotic Party, Nana Ohene Ntow, was questioned by police following allegations that Ntow incited NPP supporters to violence. Civil society leaders are calling for calm, while several Muslim community leaders have expressed concern over violence among Muslim youth [Note: The individuals involved in this violence were all Muslim. End Note] and urged supporters to settle differences peacefully. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On August 25, three individuals were killed during violence at the Konkonba Yam Market in the Agbogbloshie section of Accra. The individuals were hacked to death with machetes by members of a rival ethnic group, in a dispute over a patch of land. The plot had been occupied by a group loyal to the former governing party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), but was taken by National Democratic Congress (NDC) supporters following the latter's election victory in December.

¶3. (U) The violence is linked to clashes that took place at the market in February, 2009 and is part of the protracted Abudu/Andani conflict (Ghana's Northern Region), and the Kusasi/Mamprusi dispute (Upper East Region). While the two conflicts are not substantively related, both involve chieftaincy disputes. The Agbogbloshie market is largely dominated by migrants from northern Ghana, including Dagombas, Nanumbas, Konkombas, Mamprusis, Kusasis, and ally tribes, who are sharply divided along National Democratic Congress (NDC)/New Patriotic Party (NPP) lines with deep seated differences and hatreds.

¶4. (SBU) Konkonba Yam Market has been a haven for criminal activity. It also reportedly serves as a safe conduit for transporting weapons to the conflict in northern Ghana. This conflict appears to be over control of turf between settler communities, a problem in several markets in both Accra and Kumasi.

¶5. (SBU) On August 31 and September 1, police questioned NPP General Secretary Nana Ohene Ntow over allegations that Ntow incited the allegedly pro-NPP faction to violence at Agbogbloshie. Ntow told us September 2 that he had been questioned in the presence of his lawyers, and that he had met with party supporters to the market dispute but that he had not encouraged the conflict. He said he had advised them to lodge a formal complaint with the police and avoid violence. Ntow remains under investigation but has not been charged.

¶6. (SBU) A Muslim community leader, Shaykh Shaub Aremiyao told POL Chief September 4 that he was concerned over violence among young Muslims and that the actual dispute was remote from the market. He said he has made the point in sermons that this type of violence is completely at variance with the teachings of Islam. Aremiyao also noted his worry that this incident is encouraging negative stereotypes toward Muslims.

17. (SBU) Comment: In post's view, the violence at Agbogbloshie remains isolated and is likely to stay confined to the specific ethnic groups that originate in Northern Ghana. A weak security presence in the Agbogbloshie market has left a vacuum that has been exploited by criminals.

18. (SBU) Comment (cont'd): While the brutal violence was broadly condemned by political and civil society leaders, the politically undercurrents are serious, and - when seen in the context of the violence that took place during the Akwetia election (reftel) - demonstrate that violence among and between grassroots supporters of Ghana's main political parties remains a problem. Post will monitor this issue in the run-up to two expected by-elections later this year, and will take every opportunity to encourage political and civil society leaders to take concrete steps to eliminate politically motivated violence. End Comment.

TEITELBAUM